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SUBJECT: Central Highlands: UNHCR, Protestant Pastor Discuss
Recent Monitoring Visits

Ref: A) Hanoi 98; B) HCMC 53; C) HCMC 72

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This is a joint Hanoi-Ho Chi Minh City message.

11. (SBU) Summary: UNHCR representatives traveled to Dak Lak and Kon Tum provinces January 17-20 to meet with local officials and ethnic minority returnees. In both provinces, UNHCR interviewed a number of returnees in private. There were no allegations of mistreatment by the authorities. However, UNHCR was not able to see an individual who had allegedly been mistreated (and whom USG and EU officials also have been unable to meet.) A well-connected Protestant source in the region reports that returnees are not physically abused or directly threatened by local authorities. On the other hand, the source explains that government officials have gone to great lengths to coach returnees and other locals on what to say in meetings with international representatives. The Montagnard Foundation has also coached returnees, our contact said. End Summary.

UNHCR

12. (SBU) On January 23, UNHCR Senior Policy Officer Giuseppe de Vincentis and Vietnam Chief of Mission Vu Anh Son briefed Hanoi-based diplomats on the results of their January 17-20 monitoring trip to Dak Lak and Gia Lai provinces in the Central Highlands (text of UNHCR's prepared brief in paragraph 9). (Note: de Vincentis was originally tapped to be UNHCR's expatriate Chief of Mission in Hanoi, but, due to GVN reluctance to assent to this, will instead use his multiple-entry visa to visit Vietnam as frequently as necessary. He said he will assume the position of Deputy Regional Representative in Bangkok, most likely this summer. End Note.) Describing the Dak Lak part of the trip as very successful, the UNHCR representatives asked for and were quickly granted private meetings with a number of returnees. A similar request was initially rebuffed by officials in Gia Lai Province, who explained that private interviews could send the wrong signal, increase tensions among villagers and create an image of distrust between UNHCR and Vietnamese officials. In the end, however, the Gia Lai officials relented and granted "on an exceptional basis" private interviews with a number of returnees.

13. (SBU) None of the returnees whom the UNHCR officials met alleged any mistreatment. That said, UNHCR was unable to meet with returnee Siu Nham of Gia Lai Province (UNHCR case number MTN-406), who allegedly experienced mistreatment (Ref A) (and whom USG and EU officials also have been unable to

meet). However, UNHCR did meet with Nham's family, who said he is doing well. UNHCR also extracted a commitment from Gia Lai provincial officials to facilitate a meeting with Nham at a later date. The UNHCR team also met with an individual who had appeared very nervous during his meeting with Embassy/ConGen representatives two weeks earlier (Ref B); this individual also said that he has had no problems with the authorities since returning to Vietnam. According to de Vincentis, none of the returnees made any reference to UNHCR about meeting USG officials the week before.

14. (SBU) The UNHCR's de Vincentis reported that his GVN interlocutors, including MFA Consular Department Director General Bui Dinh Dzinh, responded positively to UNHCR's request to meet with a returnee who had been imprisoned for "people smuggling" (Ref A). Regardless of the positive response, de Vincentis surmised that it may be a while before the GVN agrees to this meeting. The GVN also indicated its willingness to inform UNHCR about any future arrests of returnees. Finally, the GVN requested, and UNHCR agreed to, assistance to train central and local government officials in legal issues related to refugees. This would most likely take the form of a seminar in April, and these officials would become trainers for other officials.

Pastor Kim

15. (SBU) Gia Lai-based Protestant Pastor Siu Y Kim (strictly protect) told ConGen HCMC PolOff January 20 that Gia Lai provincial authorities had organized meetings of all district leaders and government and police officials prior to USG and UNHCR visits to the province. The purpose of the meetings was to coach them on how to respond. The local officials and the villagers were told that the visitors will ask questions with a "bad purpose." The province had no choice but to take the groups of outsiders to the villages,

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so it was up to the village elders and the local officials to manage the situation and the delegations.

16. (SBU) To Kim's knowledge, none of the returnees was directly threatened or pressured by local authorities. He noted that international attention and the visits by representatives of the international community tie the local officials' hands to a considerable extent. However, at least some of the returnees were visited by local authorities prior to monitoring visits and told that they should not/not say anything negative to the outsiders. Many returnees are still frightened by the overall climate of intimidation and psychological pressure on the ethnic minority community in Gia Lai, Kim said.

17. (SBU) At least one returnee reported to Kim that he was instructed by the U.S.-based Montagnard Foundation to tell UNHCR representatives in Phnom Penh that he wanted to return to Vietnam, Kim continued. The returnee was promised that the Montagnard Foundation would take care of him. In Vietnam, the returnee was subsequently instructed to talk to representatives of the international community about past government mistreatment and ethnic minorities' hopes of establishing an independent Dega state. The returnee was told that the Montagnard Foundation would establish an office in Cambodia "soon."

18. (SBU) Asked to contrast conditions in Gia Lai with those in Kon Tum Province, where the USG team also visited on January 12 (Ref C), Kim acknowledged that conditions for ethnic minorities in Kon Tum were far worse: "it is like what Gia Lai and Dak Lak were a decade ago," he said. While he had no specific information about returnees, he had heard credible reports of people, including Protestant believers, having been beaten and threatened by authorities.

19. (SBU) Begin text of UNHCR briefing.

From January 17-20, 2006, UNHCR has undertaken a routine monitoring mission to Dak Lak and Gia Lai Provinces in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. The mission was conducted by Mr. Giuseppe de Vincentis, Senior Policy Officer of the Regional Office for Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam based in Bangkok, Thailand and Mr. Vu Anh Son, Chief of Mission in Vietnam. This is the 10th mission of UNHCR to the Central Highlands (the 4th mission undertaken together with UNHCR senior international officials from Bangkok and/or Phnom Penh) since the inception of the repatriation program under the framework of the Memorandum of Understanding signed between Vietnam, Cambodia and UNHCR on January 25, 2005.

The purpose of the mission was to discuss with local authorities about the returnee reintegration situation, especially after the mission of the EU to Gia Lai in November 2005, and meet with the returnees in Ea Sup District of Dak Lak Province and Chu Se, Ia Grai and Dac Doa districts of Gia Lai Province.

The UNHCR delegation was received by Mr. Duong Thanh Tuong, Standing Vice Chairman of the Dak Lak People's Committee, Mr. Pham The Dung, Chairman of the Gia Lai People's Committee and other senior officials of the two provinces. At all meetings, the local authorities informed UNHCR about economic developments in their areas, confirmed privileged policies of the Government of Vietnam toward ethnic minorities and committed to the framework of the MOU on reception and reintegration of the returnees.

UNHCR met with 6 returnee families out of total of 7 cases (8 persons) in Ea Sup District, Dak Lak Province on January 17, 2005:

--MTN-599 SIU HON, M, 1979 - returned voluntarily on November 3, 2005. IC got married in early 2005, left for Cambodia in July and returned in November 2005. His wife told us that while drinking with his two nephews on December 28, 2005, they had fought with each other. Consequently Y Ho, one of the two nephews, stabbed the neck of the IC, and he died soon after. Y Ho also broke his arm and is now being treated in the hospital. Local authorities said Y Ho would be brought to court immediately after the treatment. IC's wife was 2 months pregnant.

--MTN-600 KPA SAMAY, F, 1989 - returned voluntarily on November 3, 2005. She is very happy to have returned home. Especially, her father expressed his appreciation for

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UNHCR's arrangement for his daughter to return safely and quickly.

--MTN-602 KPA UN, M, 1989 - returned voluntarily on November 3, 2005. He said upon return he immediately started to assist his family to work in the farm. The family is very happy to see him back.

--MTN-589 RMAH DEUK, M, 1982 - returned voluntarily on November 3, 2005. He has wife and 4 children, including 3 stepchildren of his wife. They seem quite happy with current life, but it's very clear to see that their life is not easy at all.

--MTN-592 KSOR KHINH, M, 1985 - returned voluntarily on November 3, 2005. His wife is now 14 years old. He said they got married when she was only 12. His wife was very happy when he came back home.

--MTN-598 RMAH VIK, M, 1985 - returned voluntarily on November 3, 2005. He was working in the farm when we came to visit his home. His mother told us that he is happy to be back home and assisting her in the farm.

We could not visit the remaining 2 returnees (one case) in Ea sup District (MTN-588 RMAH H'MEUN and her son RMAH LOUN) as they live in different commune from others and it was already 5PM if continued we would return to Buon Ma Thuot too late since Ea Sup District is some 90 km from Buon Ma Thuot. We would also like to note that all the interviews in Ea Sup were at the returnee's home and private.

On January 18, 2005, we had met/visited 6 returnees and/or their families in Chu Se District, Gia Lai Province:

--MTN-275 KPA SAI, M, 1977 and MTN-276 KPUIH THU, M, 1979. These two Montagnards returned involuntarily on July 20, 2005. The interviews were conducted privately in the commune office of Ia Hru. KPA SAI did not have any particular questions for UNHCR and seemed OK since returning home, but preferred to go to the United States for resettlement. KPUIH THU at the end of the meeting said he was afraid of being arrested by local police as his friends in other communes were arrested before 2005 Christmas. Responded to our question whether he had ever been summoned by the local authorities, he said, "no, never". This is the second time that UNHCR had met with these two returnees. The first time was on August 3, 2005 conducted by Mr. Hasim Utkan, Regional Representative and Mr. Vu Anh Son, Chief of Mission at their home. The summary of August's visit is "We came to Kpa Sai's house where many his family members were at home. Since Kpuih's house is nearby, we agreed to ask him to join. Both of them were wearing new shirts that given by provincial authorities upon their arrival to Pleiku on July 21. They were relaxed and in good health. The family expressed their happiness for the return. The Chairman also showed his attention and concerns to these two persons by offering jobs at the state farm or cotton factory. However, the returnees seemed very reluctant to accept the offer".

--MTN-164 RLAN NGOAN, M, 1981 - returned involuntarily on July 20 and MTN-ROAN JUAN, M, 1970 - returned voluntarily on March 31, 2005. We met these two persons at the Dun Commune's office privately. While ROAN JUAN expressed that he has no problem at all since returned, RLAN NGOAN stated that local authorities did not allow him to follow "Protestant Dega" which is the only requirement that he wanted UNHCR to help him. We explained to him that UNHCR could not assist him on this issue as Dega is outlawed in Vietnam. These two cases also were visited by UNHCR in 2005. The visit of RLAN NGOAN was carried out by Mr. Hasim Utkan on August 3, 2005. The summary of the last visit is "When we came he was at his home alone. He informed that he has wife and one child. Since he returned, he has been given by local authorities fertilizers for cultivation on his over 2,000-m2 lands. He was in good health. Chairman of People's Committee of Chu Se knows him and his family quite well, as he was former director of rubber state farm, which is located in the village. Furthermore IC's uncle was head of the village. IC was offered by the Chairman a job in either the Rubber State Farm or Cotton Factory. However, IC seemed not ready for the offer".

--MTN-406 SIU NHAM, M, 1981 and MTN-277 KPA BO, M, 1979. Both returned involuntarily on July 20, 2005. After meeting with these four returnees mentioned above, we requested

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local authorities to meet with these two returnees at their home. However, when we came, none of the two were at home. Their families told us that they were working in the farm and only came back home about 6PM. Both the families seemed happy to have them back. During the mission in august 2005, Mr. Utkan and Mr. Vu Anh Son had met him at the vocational training centre of Chu Se District.

In the morning of January 19, 2006, we visited 5 families in Ia Grai District. However, we could only meet with 3 returnees, as other 2 were not at home.

--MTN-42 ROCHAM DIN, M, 1972. IC returned voluntarily on September 2, 2005. He has wife and three children. They are happy to be together and said they had no problem at all since returned. The meeting was private.

--MTN-121 PUIH CHONH, M, 1978. IC returned voluntarily on March 18, 2005. He informed that his family had just moved to the new house in November 2005. This case was met by UNHCR the first time in July 2005 when received allegations that IC was in hiding. The meeting was private.

--MTN-118 PUIH DJUN, M, 1980. IC returned voluntarily on March 11, 2005. He has wife but no children yet. He is happy to return and has been working in his farm since returned. The meeting was in his garden and the official of Gia Lai People's Committee was around.

--MTN-281 PUIH DUC, M, 1983. IC returned voluntarily on May 7, 2005 and visited UNHCR three times before. But he was not at home when we came.

--MTN-119 RMAH KUET, M, 1985. IC returned involuntarily on July 20. He was not at home when we came. The neighbor informed that he was working in his farm, which is quite far away from his home.

In the afternoon of January 19 we went to Dac Doa District where we had met two returnees at Ha Bau Commune's office privately.

--MTN-209 PUIH KRAI, M, 1984. IC returned involuntarily on July 20, 2005. We talked with him together with his parents. They said their son had no problems since returned. The discussion was very open and frank. Finally IC stated that he does not want UNHCR visit his family again as they would waste their time for nothing.

--MTN-213 KSOR PHYON, M, 1984. IC returned involuntarily on July 20, 2005. Since his house is very close to the communal office, upon our request, local authorities agreed we would meet him privately at his home. It was very impressive that our talk was almost in English as IC is quite talented in language. He and his family are happy to return home. He said he had no problem since returning. He just got married 2 months ago and his wife is only 16 years old.

End text of briefing.

BOARDMAN